

July 13, 2010

Washington, DC – Rep. Ben Ray Luján applauded new guidelines established yesterday by the Department of Veterans Affairs that will improve access to PTSD treatment for veterans. According to the VA, the new guidelines will reduce “the evidence needed if the PTSD stressor claimed by a Veteran is related to fear of hostile military or terrorist activity and is consistent with the places, types, and circumstances of the Veteran’s service.”

“The men and women of our Armed Forces have sacrificed for our country, and when they return home they deserve the best care, including comprehensive health services,” said Rep. Luján. “By making it easier for veterans to file PTSD claims, the VA is taking an important step toward fulfilling our country’s responsibility to our veterans.”

Rep. Luján has worked to improve mental health services for soldiers and veterans. In the National Defense Reauthorization Act, Rep. Luján added an amendment with Representatives Michael McMahon (D-NY), Tom Rooney (R-FL) and Harry Teague (D-NM) that will improve mental health services for our soldiers.

In the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2008, Congress requested that the Institute of Medicine (IOM) convene a committee to examine the credentials, preparation, and training of licensed mental health counselors who work with veterans and members of the military. In this report, sponsored by the Department of Defense (DOD), the IOM committee makes recommendations for permitting counselors to practice independently under the TRICARE program. In addition, the committee recommends that TRICARE implement a comprehensive quality management system for all of its mental health professionals.

Rep. Luján’s amendment urges the Secretary of Defense to comply with these recommendations by December 31, 2010. Allowing counselors to practice independently would ultimately increase the mental health staff working with DOD, increasing access for service men and women in need and eventually reducing the horrifying trend of rising suicide rates and post-traumatic stress disorder among our troops.

[Read the fact sheet on the new guidelines.](#)